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AFGHAN PIONEER

F. MUSGRAVE





AN AFGHAN PIONEER

15/-

AN AFGHAN PIONEER

THE STORY OF JAHAN KHAN]

BY
L. F. MUSGRAVE

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AN AFGHAN PIONEER

THE STORY OF JAHAN KHAN

I

DAY begins early in the East. As the first pale light of dawn, a mere promise of the day, shows faintly in the eastern sky, the long-drawn monotonous chant of the muezzin rises from the mosques in every quarter, calling the faithful to prayer; and as the high-pitched, melancholy notes float out upon the morning stillness, every devout Moslem rises, and washes his hands, face, and feet, for he may not commence his devotions without this preliminary ceremonial of purification. Then he hastens to the mosque to offer his tribute of prayer and praise to the Creator, ere the business of the day begins.

From high above, as out of distant spaces, the far, faint call: "Come to prayer. Come to prayer. Prayer is better than sleep," reached Jahan Khan.

The boy roused himself wearily from his slumbers. He had spent much of the night in

attendance upon his sick father, Ismail Khan, an Afghan merchant, who had suddenly been stricken down with illness while journeying homeward to the distant valley of Laghman—a secluded little spot hidden away among the pine-clad highlands between Kabul and Jelalabad. He had spent two years travelling in India, buying and selling, and making contracts for road-making, an art in which the Afghans are particularly adept. His young son, Jahan Khan, was with him serving his apprenticeship in his father's trade.

Jahan Khan rose hastily from his mat and after an anxious glance at the sick man, who had fallen into an uneasy slumber, he crept from the tent. On the barren hillside where they had encamped, no water could be had for the ablutions prescribed by his religion, so he cleansed his hands and feet with sand, and ran down the hill to join the throng of worshippers at a little mosque on the roadside. It was a small building cemented together with mud, and from a niche in the centre, his face toward Mecca, the holy city, the "mullah" or priest led the prayers of the congregation.

"God is good, God is great, I give witness there is no God but God. I give witness that Mohammed is the prophet of God. God is

• great," and so on through all the genuflections and postures of the recognized ceremonial.

Jahan Khan, troubled in mind and sad at heart, found little consolation in the endless repetition. It had been the dream of his life to accompany his father on one of his expeditions. How joyously he had set out with Ismail Khan, joining a caravan with its string of baggage-camels. Half-a-dozen well armed Afghans had accompanied them as escort, for they had first to pass through the hostile country of the Waziris, a wild mountain tribe, who claimed ancestral rights to plunder caravans that passed through their territory.

It needed no little courage and knowledge of the country to guide a party, laden with merchandise, through the rocky defiles of these mountain passes; travellers were constantly exposed to attack from the mountaineers, securely hidden behind the rocks on either side. Ismail Khan was a noted merchant and knew the country well, and he led his party through the passes without any misadventure, and Jahan had had his heart's desire; he had seen some of the great cities of India, with their wonders of art and beauty and wealth. Yet how glad he had been when their faces were set homeward, for at times a great hunger for home and his mother had seized upon

him. They had not gone far when his father was taken ill. The "hakim," or doctor, whom the boy had fetched from the nearest village bled the sick man, and compounded a noxious draught, but it did not benefit the sufferer. On his next visit Jahan Khan had offered him a higher fee if only he would cure his father. The hakim pocketed the fee, but did not effect a cure. Then the village "imam" (teacher) told of a "sadhu" (holy man)—Bashi, who could give a charm that would drive out any disease, "that is, if it be the will of God," he added thoughtfully; "and every one knows a charm is worth a thousand hakims."

Jahan Khan had fetched the sadhu, who gave the sick man a charm—a few words written on a scrap of parchment and sewn up in a piece of goat's skin—for which he was paid the price of a camel. This charm the sadhu directed Jahan Khan to tie around his father's neck.

Yet the sick man grew weaker day by day; the poor lad, friendless and alone, in a strange country, knew not where to turn for aid, and it was with a heavy heart that he joined in the prayers in the mosque.

II

THROUGHOUT the service a great calm prevailed within the mosque, but as soon as the imam came to the end of the morning prayers the assembled faithful made a rush for the open courtyard, and with a sense of relief from a great oppression Jahan Khan sped away to the village to procure milk, and other necessaries for the invalid. It was a Friday, and hundreds of hill men had come down for the weekly fair. The bazaar was already teeming with life and movement. Suddenly Jahan Khan espied among the crowd collected on the steps of the caravanserai a tall, handsome Pathan, with whom his father had lately made a business deal to the satisfaction of both parties. Pushing his way through the shouting, jostling throng, Jahan Khan hailed him joyfully.

"Salaam alaikum" ("Peace to you"), "O Mohammed Ali."

The man, turning in answer to the salutation, recognized the boy, and with an answering "Wa alaikum salaam" ("To thee be peace"), "O Jahan Khan," he asked for news of his father.

Jahan Khan told him of his father's illness, and of the dilemma in which they were placed.

"For indeed he gets no better but rather worse, and I think he is even now at the point of death, although Sadhu Bashi—every one knows what a holy man he is—has given him a charm which is said to drive out any disease if it be the will of God, and for which we paid him the price of a camel, yet is my father no better."

"Ai, Allah, surely it is the will of God," said Mohammed Ali consolingly; "but," he added, "since your father is so ill, why do you not take him to the feringhi daktar sahib at Dera Ismail Khan; it is but a day's journey."

"What, to an infidel feringhi?" exclaimed the boy.

"Oh, what of that? Every one knows all the feringhis are infidels. He can cure diseases all the same. I myself have seen some truly wonderful cures: numbers of people are going to him. The strange thing is that he doesn't trouble about money; any one may go to him, he sees them all alike, rich or poor, for nothing at all."

"But surely that is very strange, he must have some reason."

"Well, the reason seems to be that he preaches to the people. He wants everybody to believe

• that Hazrat Esa (Lord Jesus) is the Son of God."

"Tauba" ("I repent"), exclaimed Jahan Khan aghast, "but that is blasphemy."

"Oh, well, that's as may be," said Mohammed Ali indifferently, "what I say is, the feringhis to their religion, we to ours; you needn't listen, and if he *can* cure your father——"

"Oh, I wonder. Come and talk to my father, and let us see if we can persuade him to it."

Whatever faults an Afghan may possess, to forsake a friend in the hour of need is not one of them, and Mohammed Ali went with the boy. At first Ismail Khan did not take kindly to the idea. How was it likely that an infidel feringhi, a blasphemer of the holy Prophet, could cure him? A charm was worth a thousand hakims—no, he would not go. However, the persuasions of Mohammed Ali finally prevailed and he consented to go.

Dera Ismail Khan is an important trading centre and meeting place for merchants from all parts of the country. Mohammed Ali had business to transact there, and he agreed to conduct the sick man to the mission hospital there on one of his baggage-camels, and told Jahan Khan to be in readiness to start the next day at sunrise.

III

TRUE to his promise Mohammed Ali arrived at daybreak the following morning with a camel and driver for Ismail Khan. The camel knelt obediently for its load, and Ismail Khan, on his "charpoy" or native bed, was securely fastened on its back. With a grunt the patient creature staggered to its feet and set off at a swinging pace down the hillside to join the rest of Mohammed Ali's party who had gone on in advance. The jolt of the camel's stride wearied the sufferer sorely, but it was hopeless to leave him by the roadside without medical aid or care of any sort, so they pushed steadily on until, as the sun was setting in a glow of golden glory beyond the hills, they entered Dera Ismail Khan.

In a very short time they arrived at the mission hospital, where they were admitted immediately and received with every kindness by the English doctor and his helpers. After a few cheery words of welcome the doctor briefly examined the patient, and sent him to a small private ward with Jahan Khan to take charge of him. Mohammed Ali, with many expressions of gratitude to the doctor for his timely aid, wished them farewell and wended his way to the caravanserai.

IV

AT an early hour the following morning, hospital work was in full swing. Patients arrived in every kind of conveyance. Some were carried in on native beds, some came in palanquins, some on oxen, some on asses, and some on camels. The verandas were full of patients, men in one, women and children in the other, and an Indian teacher was preaching to them.

Interested by the scenes of animation around him, curiosity prompted Jahan Khan to discover what was going on here, and for the first time in his life he heard the simple gospel story. When he realized what he was doing, he quickly put his fingers in his ears and ran away, and when the hour for midday prayer arrived he repeated a number of extra prayers which the holy Prophet Mohammed had appointed for those who had some special sin to expiate. It was not alone that fidelity to his religion required that he should not listen to words spoken which might defile his faith, but he had also to balance the account

against him by his act in bringing his father to the mission hospital.

The boy was surprised to find every facility given for the performance of his religious duties, indeed it almost seemed that the feringhi daktar sahib could not be the miscreant he had feared, for instead of reviling the holy Prophet, as Jahan Khan had expected, he encouraged all the Moslems who came to the mission hospital to be faithful in the performance of their devotions, and to study their religion carefully.

Religion fills a large place in the life of the average Moslem. He firmly believes in the deity of God, in His power and His clemency, and the subject of religion furnishes a frequent topic of conversation. Ismail Khan was a devout Moslem, and he had many discussions with the doctor on this question, but while acknowledging the Christ as the greatest prophet of God before the coming of Mohammed, and believing that the book of the Christians was truly the Word of God, he claimed that the teachings of Mohammed superseded those of Christ.

The invalid did not make the speedy recovery hoped for, and this was a bitter disappointment. The doctor and his assistants were unremitting in

their care, doing everything that medical skill could suggest, but the malady grew steadily worse. Whereupon the poor man felt he had jeopardized his soul's salvation for nothing, and determined to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of a famous saint which was noted for its healing virtues.

V

ISMAIL KHAN therefore told his son to hire four sturdy Pathans to carry him in his charpoy to the tomb of Sakki Sarwar, the shrine of the famous saint. The invalid overruled all the remonstrances of the doctor and his friends, but while expressing the deepest gratitude for the kindness he had received from them, he could not be dissuaded from his purpose.

In the cool of one early morning he set off with his four bearers, accompanied by Jahan Khan. The route to the shrine was crowded with pilgrims, some of them having trudged upwards of a hundred miles bringing some sick relative on whose behalf they wanted to invoke the blessing of the saint. Beneath the burning midday sun, half-blinded by the glare, they struggled valiantly forward, until, as the welcome shades of evening crept above the horizon, they could see in the distance the bare brown hills towering behind the little town of Sakki Sarwar. Reaching the town, they made their way at once to the mosque which enshrines the sacred tomb of the saint. It was too dark to see the full beauty of the minarets

surrounding the gateway or of the azure-blue tiles of the roof, but the pilgrims were content that, in the courage begotten of faith and hope, they had overcome the difficulties of the journey, and reached the sacred spot. The solemn silence of the night was broken by the sound of prayer, rising in waves of fervent devotion from hundreds of burdened hearts.

VI

I SMAIL KHAN made a votive offering to the saint, and in symbol thereof, as was the custom, he tore a strip of cloth from his pugaree, and tied it to a branch of one of the tamarisks which grew around the grave. It was of no avail, however. Once again disappointment awaited him. He was terribly exhausted by the long and toilsome journey, and his malady grew rapidly worse. Within a few days Jahan Khan found himself an orphan.

It had been Ismail Khan's last desire that his body should be embalmed and carried back to the valley of Laghman, to be buried in the ancestral graveyard with all the solemn ceremonial rites due to the occasion, but Jahan Khan, without money and without friends, and hundreds of miles from home, found it impossible to carry out his father's dying wish. He had therefore to content himself with burying his father as near as he could to the tomb of the great saint, the influence of whose sanctity would overshadow the resting place, atone for any shortcomings, and thus assure for the departed an unquestioned

entry into bliss on the resurrection day. A little group of pilgrims accompanied the solitary mourner as he followed his father to the grave soon after sunrise. In soft cadences they bewailed the death of their fellow-pilgrim, and fervent prayers were sent upwards on his behalf.

VII

THIS sad duty accomplished, Jahan Khan's next step was to seek for employment, but none of the Moslems he consulted were particularly anxious to employ one who was a stranger to the district. One man advised him to apply to the feringhi daktar sahib at the mission hospital at Bannu, as he knew he wanted a boy who could speak Pushto. Jahan Khan scornfully refused. He greatly resented the idea of serving a feringhi. He had no intention of risking his soul's salvation by serving an infidel, a blasphemer of the holy Prophet.

"Ai, ai, chicken-heart," laughed the man. "Is thy corn bin so full that thou canst trouble thy head with such matters? If thou shalt say thy prayers, and read the Koran, and keep the fast, what shall harm thee? See thou dost not eat of their food," he added as an afterthought, "lest it contain swine's flesh."

"There is magic in their words," the boy rejoined, "and if you listen to them you become as one of them." And he turned away fully determined not to look for work in that direction.

However, nothing else offered. His need became pressing. "Surely it is the hand of fate, no one can escape his kismet," he thought dismally, as in desperation he plodded along the dusty road which led to the mission bungalow; yet upon arrival, the doctor's welcome cheered and comforted him, in spite of his religious fears.

His story told, Dr. Pennell, who had not long been in India and wanted a servant to whom he would be obliged to speak Pushto, readily accepted his offer of service, and a new and wonderful experience opened up for the lonely boy.

The mission school which he found in Bannu particularly aroused his interest. Boys of all ages and all religions, coming from all classes of the community, worked and played together. The cricket team was made up of Hindus, Mohammedans, and Christians indiscriminately. Their captain was a Christian who had been a Hindu. That a Hindu should take precedence of a Moslem was subversive of all Jahan Khan's ideas of religion. He sought an opportunity to question one of the senior boys about it. "But he plays cricket well," was the astounding reply he received, "and that's the only thing that matters here. It is only the unlearned who bother about

these matters now," the boy added loftily, as he ran off to join the cricket team in the field.

"And how can one learn without a teacher?" asked Jahan Khan bitterly. There was so much to puzzle his undeveloped mind. It seemed to him that there was learning for all these boys, but none for him who so much desired knowledge and thirsted for information.

VIII

AS Jahan Khan, feeling very disconsolate, was crossing the compound he saw a young Afghan munshi lounging in the shade of an overshadowing tree near the doctor's bungalow. This man came daily to give the doctor a lesson in Pushto, and he often amused himself while waiting for the doctor by making sport of Jahan Khan; discovering that his inability to read rankled in the boy's mind, the munshi often twitted him on the subject.

"Hai, mudhead," was the munshi's greeting, "where is now thy master? Go tell him Yakub waits."

"Truly dost thou say 'mudhead'!" exclaimed Jahan Khan, in the bitterness of his spirit, "yet could I but find a teacher, I would read of the written word even as thou and these others," waving his hand in the direction of the mission school.

"Ohe! wouldst thou indeed," replied the munshi mockingly. "Know then that it is only by labour and the sweat of the brow that know-

ledge is attained. Learning is not for such as thee."

"But wherefore not, since I can pay, if so be I can find a teacher?" Jahan Khan answered boldly. "And in giving light to the ignorant merit is attained," he added shrewdly.

"True, mudhead, but dost thou think that such as thou canst acquire wisdom?"

"Why not, since I can pay? If thou wilt teach me to read from the written word thy payment is assured; I give thee my bond, and thou shalt acquire merit thereby besides."

The munshi burst out laughing. "Ai, Allah! Hark to the owl," he exclaimed. "Yet, block-head, since thou art so minded I will even now give thee a lesson," and still laughing, for his sense of humour was tickled, he snapped a branch from the overhanging tamarisk, and drew the letters of the Pushto alphabet in the sand, while Jahan Khan watched him eager-eyed.

IX

HESEAFTER Jahan Khan hurried through his morning duties that he might secure the coveted half-hour's leisure for a lesson from the munshi.

In a short time he had mastered the alphabet, and Yakub, looking around for some simple book for the first reading lesson, happened on a copy of a gospel in Pushto. Opening the book haphazard he passed it to the boy, and Jahan Khan slowly spelled out the almost incredible words : "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you."

Strange words indeed. He drew the munshi's attention to them. According to Mohammed the law demanded "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," and the claims of "sharm," or honour, demanded that a man "shoot his enemy, and—if he can—get his rifle. What new teaching was this?"

The Afghan laughed. "Ohe, what a head ! Get on with thy task, and beware lest in getting a little learning thou be overtaken of pride, which is a grievous fault."

Jahan Khan was silenced, but the words had made a deep impression. He thirsted for knowledge, and spent every moment he could in seeking to unravel this tangled web of words. Stealing away into quiet corners with his book he tried to discover the meaning of what he read. His continual questions about the teachings of this book annoyed the munshi, who at last, alarmed at the effect it was having on the lad, angrily advised him to leave learning alone, and stalked off carrying the precious gospel with him. All Jahan Khan's persuasions were useless. The munshi firmly refused to continue the reading lessons.

"Go back to thy household tasks, mudhead, these things be too high for thee," he replied sternly.

"Wherefore should not I read of the written word, even as thou?" asked Jahan Khan with dignity. But the munshi was obdurate, and turned away vouchsafing no answer.

This was a bitter blow to Jahan Khan's bright hopes; he had caught a fleeting glimpse of the riches concealed behind the golden gates of knowledge, which now seemed closed for ever before his longing eyes.

X

ONE day a man, Faiz Ullah by name, from the Kabul district, was brought in to the hospital suffering from a serious gunshot wound in the chest. His comrades, native fashion, on finding him wounded, had applied a compress of charred cloth and yolk of egg, then they put him on a native bed, and four of his friends carried him right over the stony mountain paths to the mission hospital at Bannu. His condition upon arrival was indescribable. This man proved to be an old acquaintance of Ismail Khan's, and Jahan Khan eagerly volunteered to look after his father's old friend.

The man made a remarkable recovery, and one morning when Jahan Khan was assisting the doctor with his dressings, Faiz Ullah suddenly said : " See here now, daktar sahib, here are some rupees, will you get me some cartridges ? I am much stronger now, and in a few days I can go home."

" Then what do you want the cartridges for ? " inquired the doctor.

" Why, I want to get my revenge, of course."

"What I after all we have taught you since you came here, cannot you forgo your revenge, Faiz Ullah? Have we taken so much care and trouble over you only for this? And I suppose in a few days we may expect to have your enemy brought in and have the same thing all over again."

"Ohe, my daktar sahib, don't you fear that," replied Faiz Ullah promptly. "I am a better shot than he is by a long way."

"Christ teaches us to forgive our enemies," was the doctor's quiet reply. "He came to earth as Prince of Peace to teach men that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.'"

"True," murmured Faiz Ullah half apologetically, "but God has decreed there shall always be discord among the Afghans, so what can one do?"

"The mullah assures me," objected another patient, "that these things are not for us. He says the teachings of Mohammed have superseded the teachings of Christ."

"And yet Christ forgave His enemies," exclaimed Jahan Khan, who had been following the conversation intently.

Every eye in the ward was instantly turned upon him.

"You are right, my boy," the doctor said as

Jahan Khan turned away in confusion ; and then he proceeded to speak to them of the wondrous peace of heart that comes to those who learn the true meaning of love ; he told them of the One Who, in His supreme love, offered Himself in His stainless purity to be the Saviour of sinners, the Light of the world. He spoke with the simplicity of one who knows, with the clearness and certainty of one who has no manner of doubt, and his words sank deeply into Jahan Khan's heart.

That afternoon the boy determined to go to the missionary and tell him of all the doubts and fears which were oppressing him. Following him to the veranda, he said : "Oh, daktar sahib, arz laram" ("I have a request").

The doctor was greatly interested in the boy, who hitherto had held himself resolutely aloof from all friendly advances in the fear that any sort of contact would, by some mysterious means, thrust conversion upon him ; therefore his remark that morning had been a great surprise and pleasure. "Khismat farmaye" ("Tell me of any service"), he said with ready sympathy.

Jahan Khan found words unequal to the burden of his thoughts. "It is only within a little time I have learned to read, and even now I cannot read very well," he stammered. Then,

encouraged by the doctor's kindly interest, he told him about the reading lessons, and their miserable ending. The doctor gave Jahan Khan a testament, promising to explain its teachings, and help him with his reading lessons. Believing mere materialism to be a greater enemy to Christianity than Islam or Hinduism, he talked with him of his own religion, advising him to try to understand its deeper meaning. Dr. Pennell emphasized any points of unity between his own Christian faith and Jahan Khan's beliefs, and then began to show him something of the peerless beauty of the character of the Christ Whom Christians worship.

XI

THE reading lesson soon became the event of the day to Jahan Khan, and he joyfully went to his books when the usual day's work was done. He was still zealous in the performance of all the duties prescribed in his own religion, yet he no longer stopped his ears, but lingered to listen to the Bible teacher when he was speaking to the patients; and the stories that he heard of the Good Shepherd, of His compassion and miracles of healing, filled his thoughts.

Presently a whisper went round that Jahan Khan had become the daktar sahib's "chela", or disciple. To become a pervert from Islam is an unpardonable offence; the rage and vindictiveness of his Moslem compatriots knew no bounds, and tried his reckless Pathan temper to its utmost limits.

"Here comes the blasphemer," shouted one of the men as Jahan Khan, who was beginning to help with the nursing, entered the hospital ward, and a storm of abuse greeted him from all sides. "Son of an owl, thy mother has no nose," cried another.

The hot blood surged wildly to Jahan Khan's head. He sprang forward and would have felled the man with a blow, but a little Khostwal lad who was hopping about on crutches stood in his way.

"The mother of Mir Zaman's son hath an artificial nose," he chirped in. "Mir Zaman told Dilawar Khan that he paid thirty rupees for it." The big swarthy Afghans burst out laughing.

"Little son, thou hast long ears," exclaimed one.

"Why, one could surely get a good new wife for very little more," cried another incredulously, for the Afghan husband firmly believes it his infallible right to cut off his wife's nose at the slightest provocation.

"True," remarked an old man drily from the corner bed, "but then you see Mir Zaman has now, not only a useful wife, but also a removable nose."

The humour of this situation seemed obvious. The digression aided Jahan Khan to stem the tide of his suddenly aroused fury, and his efforts toward self-mastery and forbearance were not lost upon his persecutors, who nevertheless continued to assail him with every opprobrious epithet in their repertory. Jahan Khan had to prove that

the way of the Cross was an upward way, and no road for the weakling or half-hearted.

One day two stalwart Pathans seized him from behind, and while they beat him a third tried to strangle his cries by twisting his pugaree round and round his neck. The doctor, who was sitting quietly studying on the veranda of his bungalow, hearing the shouts and a cry of "Oh, my daktar sahib!" rushed out, and, seeing Jahan Khan struggling with his assailants, called for help and rushed down the hill to his assistance. The men immediately made off to the hills, leaving Jahan Khan half stunned, and the doctor and his servant carried him back to the bungalow. He was weary and exhausted by this encounter, and almost driven to despair. Added to these continual persecutions he was tormented by his own doubts and fears. He had slipped from the moorings of his own faith and embarked upon an unknown sea, and at times he felt himself drifting helpless, rudderless, alone. In his heart he longed to follow Christ, but he knew so little, and life seemed difficult, so he hesitated.

"Why cannot I follow Christ, and yet go to the mosque and act like a Mohammedan?" he questioned.

He felt he had come to a parting of the ways;

either he must openly declare himself a Christian and brave the storms of persecution which he knew would ensue, or remain for ever true to the Mohammedan faith.

Dr. Pennell knew that a Mohammedan, in accepting Christianity, must also accept the penalty of danger and disgrace, and very truly bear the reproach of the Cross; even the nearest relative cannot be depended upon to protect him from the odium he incurs in becoming a pervert from Islam, and the doctor deeply sympathized with the boy in his mental struggle.

"But," he said, "unless you can learn to endure the Cross, 'despising the shame,' you cannot be Christ's disciple, for Christ Himself says: 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed.' 'Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in Heaven'!"

This time of trial and testing was not in vain. Jahan Khan henceforward openly avowed himself a Christian, and before long he confessed Christ publicly in the bazaar. Mud and stones and the foulest abuse were showered upon him, but he stood firm in his adherence to the Christian faith, and asked that he might be baptized. The

service took place in the government church at Sheik Budin, and Jahan Khan was the first Pathan to be baptized there—the first-fruits of Dr. Pennell's work on the borders of Afghanistan.

XII

THE valley of Laghman, Jahan Khan's birth-place, is noted for its orchards of apples and peaches, its walnut and plane trees, which afford a welcome shelter during the summer heat. Sparkling rivulets thread their way down from the hills dancing in the sunlight, fertilizing the rice crops planted terrace above terrace on the slopes of the valley.

Jahan Khan was very happy in his work at the mission hospital at Bannu. Every day he was learning something fresh. He helped in the wards and even in the operating theatre as a dresser ; he moved in and out among the patients, taking his part in caring for them ; by degrees he picked up some of the secrets of dispensing. He persevered in his reading, especially of the New Testament, and, shyly at first, but gradually with more confidence, he talked to the patients of the Master Who had captured the love and allegiance of his heart. Religious fervour is a characteristic of the Afghan, and Jahan Khan had found One worthy of his devotion.

As the weeks passed his thoughts often turned wistfully toward the pine-clad highlands of his boyhood's home. And with the approach of

another summer the stifling heat of the plains seemed intolerable to him ; he craved for a breath of his native mountain air. In fact he became desperately homesick, and longed to see his mother and brothers, and above all to carry the light of the Gospel to his own kindred. He was fully aware of the risks he ran in this undertaking, but he set out upon his adventure with hopes high and in exuberant spirits. When making preparations for his journey he sewed some copies of the gospels in Pushto and Persian inside his baggy Afghan trousers. On reaching Jelalabad he was arrested as a spy, and this secret hiding place was nearly discovered ; friendly overtures to his guards finally led to his effecting an escape.

When he ultimately reached home there were great rejoicings. His mother was overjoyed to see her long-lost son, and his brothers welcomed him with every token of delight. They made a feast in his honour, the festivities extending over many days.

Then, as the days passed and Jahan Khan did not appear at public prayers, the villagers began to talk. They first questioned his relatives, who shielded him on the plea of his long journey, his preoccupation in the festivities of homecoming ; but as time went on and Jahan Khan still remained

an absentee from the mosque, a whisper went around that Jahan Khan was no longer of the true faith.

One of the mullahs, a brother of Ismail Khan and much respected by the villagers on account of his piety, challenged Jahan Khan to proclaim his innocence of this calumny, and repeat the Kalima (the articles of the Mohammedan faith) publicly in the village "chauk," or general meeting place.

Jahan Khan arrived at the appointed hour, but to his uncle's surprise and dismay he openly confessed himself a follower of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

"But this is blasphemy," the people cried with one voice. "A curse on the unbelieving dog. God has no Son."

"What a tale, what a tale," cried his mother. "Can it indeed be true that my son has become a blasphemer and sold himself to the devil? Woe is me."

She flung her arms around him as if to protect him from the angry mob. Jahan Khan tried to comfort and reassure her, but she wept bitterly, reproaching and caressing him by turns.

"You *are* still my son," she cried.

She had very little idea what a Christian really

was, but she felt that her son had brought dis-honour upon the family, and knew that the villagers were claiming that he should be put to death.

But Jahan Khan's uncle, who by reason of his sanctity was greatly revered, after much argument appeased them, and they agreed to spare Jahan Khan's life on condition that he left the country immediately, never to return.

Very sorrowfully Jahan Khan agreed to this, and his mother, with bitter lamentations, prepared some food for his journey. Meanwhile she adjured him not to return to these Christians, "for truly folks are right, there is magic in their words, and they lead men astray to follow after strange gods."

Before leaving Jahan Khan offered some of the testaments he had brought with him to his uncle and two other mullahs who came to argue with him. They accepted the gospels, for they were curious to know what the teachings of the book of the Christians really were, but they warned Jahan Khan not to tell any one he had given them the books, as it would not be wise for the people of the village to know they were in possession of such heretical literature. They told him he was guilty of mortal sin in allowing a doubt even as

to the truth of Islam to enter his mind. Finding him obdurate, they formally cursed him by all the anathemas of the Koran for this world and the next, before sending him away an outcast from his native place.

His mother, however, her love prevailing over her religious fears, accompanied him to the outskirts of the village and embraced him tenderly ere he parted from her for ever. "Though you bring me in sorrow to the grave, yet are you still my son ; woe is me that you should have become a blasphemer," she cried. It was a sad farewell, and the mother wept bitterly as she watched her long-lost and newly-found son disappear from sight over a distant hill crest.

This banishment was a terrible disappointment to Jahan Khan ; he longed to teach his own people what he had learned and to share his joy with them ! However, the journey was not as fruitless as it appeared, for only a year later his brother and two cousins came down from Laghman to Bannu to see him and to hear more about the Christ for Whose sake Jahan Khan had accepted obloquy and exile from home and country. One of them was baptized and remained to work in the hospital ; the others returned to their homes after a short time.

XIII

ON leaving his mother Jahan Khan went on foot to the nearest caravanserai, and joined one of the huge merchant caravans which twice in the week cross over the Khyber Pass on their way into India, for it would have been unsafe for a man to attempt to travel alone by the mountain roads.

Soon after the caravan had started a man among the travellers entered into conversation with Jahan Khan. As the day wore on, they became very friendly, and in the evening the man suggested that he should join him and his companions for supper.

"We have just slain a kid and made a most delicious stew; come and share it," he said hospitably, and Jahan Khan gratefully accepted the invitation, for he was feeling lonely and heart-sore.

They welcomed him as an honoured guest, and his host's young brother stood behind to serve him with all he needed. He was given a portion of soup flavoured strongly with some pungent aromatic herb. It was appetizing, and Jahan

Khan was hungry after the day's journey, but within a few moments he began to feel drowsy.

One of the men began to sing a popular Indian air : "Think a moment, O careless one, how little certainty there is in this life," but ere the song was ended Jahan Khan had lost consciousness. Whether his secret was known, or whether he was merely believed to be worth robbing is uncertain, but his host had added to his guest's portion of soup a poisonous herb which seriously affects the brain and endangers the health of those who chance to partake of it. The host and his friends noted its effects on Jahan Khan with evident satisfaction and continued their meal with great enjoyment. They sang songs and recited stories for a long time. Then two of the men carefully searched the unconscious man. Finding very little money and no books or papers upon him, they angrily cursed the unbelieving dog of a kafir and flung him down in a dark corner of the caravanserai until the morning.

XIV

JAHAN KHAN knew nothing more till some days later the caravan drew up at the caravanserai at Peshawar. Who had befriended him and how he got there he could not tell. He was feeling terribly weak and ill. With a great effort he struggled to his feet and made his way through the arched cloisters where the camels and horse caravans put up till he came to the crowded square. All manner of folk were collected there, loading and unloading bales and bundles, drawing water from the well, bargaining, swearing, shouting. Bewildered and dizzy, he forced his way through the crush till he came to the high gates which led from the caravanserai into the still more crowded bazaar, ablaze with light, and the eager press of men and women occupied with affairs of business and pleasure. As one in a dream he passed through the throng and on up the long quiet street till he reached the mission bungalow. The missionary took him in and cared for him, and gradually the remembrance of the evening feast at the caravanserai returned to him. It was many days before he could resume his journey to Bannu and very much longer before he regained his previous health.

XV

UNDAUNTED by these difficulties, Jahan Khan longed more than ever to pass on to others the light that meant so much to him. If he could have done more for his own family he would, but as they would not have him he turned to others. As soon as he regained his health he went down to the bazaar at Bannu to preach. This was always an exciting event, and seemed at first to arouse more opposition than anything else. This was the experience day after day. After Jahan Khan had got well under way a mullah, supported by a group of his "talibs," or students, started some abstruse theological discussion, and, finding Jahan Khan's arguments unanswerable, they incited the people to acts of violence, and the foulest abuse was showered upon the preacher. When affairs began to get serious the mullah discovered it was time for afternoon prayers and that he must hurry away. "Hark to the pious one," the talibs cried after him. "All good Moslems go away; he is no true Mussalman who listens to these kafirs" (this being a term of

contempt used toward foreigners and Christians). They then set upon the preachers with jeers and curses and tried to drive them from their stand. But Jahan Khan was an excellent pioneer ; his pride of race and calm self-reliance enabled him to withstand these wild tribesmen ; he well understood his bazaar audiences, who would have taken the slightest show of fear as a sign of defeat, and, added to his fearlessness, his simple words and warmth of feeling gradually won a way for him.

XVI

WHEN, later in the year, Dr. Pennell set out on an expedition to India, he took Jahan Khan with him. They visited several medical missions on the road, and in one of these met a young Indian girl who, having been brought to the Christian faith when attending a mission school for girls, was receiving training as a midwife and compounder. Jahan Khan had never before had the companionship of a young woman of his own faith, one with him in religious ideals and inspired with the same zeal for service to their own people. His lonely heart went out to the little Indian maiden, and the thought of parting from her was very bitter.

In Moslem countries women are considered to be soulless; from infancy they are employed in the most menial occupations and are never permitted to enter the mosques for public prayer. The Afghans purchase a wife for a sum of money or its equivalent in cattle perhaps. Jahan Khan knew that this was not the custom among Christians, and at last he confided his difficulty to his much-loved daktar sahib, and asked him to

arrange a marriage for him with Amrit-bibi for his bride.

Dr. Pennell promised to speak on Jahan Khan's behalf to the lady doctor in whose care Amrit-bibi was pursuing her studies. When Amrit-bibi herself was consulted in the matter, after some hesitation she consented to return to Bannu with Jahan Khan. Jahan Khan was overjoyed, and preparations were made for an immediate marriage, the wedding ceremony taking place in the little Christian church connected with the mission hospital.

A time of very great happiness now dawned for Jahan Khan. Separated from his family from boyhood, he had never known the joy of home life, and the gentle companionship of Amrit-bibi was as light and life to him. Having the same ideals of service and some training, she was also an efficient helper with him in the work of the mission.

XVII

AMONG the audience which frequented the bazaar preachings was a young Afghan talib from the Peshawar district, who, although joining with his fellow students in creating a disturbance during the Gospel preaching, was nevertheless deeply impressed by Jahan Khan's calm forbearance in the face of repeated attacks and all the opprobrium the talibs heaped upon him.

He asked a talib belonging to the district who these "kafirs" were. "The one in the dress of the mullah (referring to Dr. Pennell, who always wore the native dress) is a feringhi, whom we call the *padre sahib*," he replied. "He has built a hospital here, and he preaches to all the people about Hazrat Esa, and has indeed misled many; in fact, the other kafir, who is an Afghan from Laghman, has been led astray by him. May God destroy them both," he concluded piously.

One day the champions of Islam found themselves unable to answer some argument put forward by Jahan Khan. There was an unusual stir

among the crowd. Some one called out : "He is no true Mussulman who listens to these kafirs. There is no God but God." With one voice the crowd took up the refrain : "La ilaha illa'llahu Mohammed rasulu'llah," following it up with jeers and curses till the echoes rang. Jahan Khan's quiet demeanour in the midst of this uproar aroused the sympathy and admiration of the young Afghan, Taib Khan. He waited till the other talibs had gone, and then Jahan Khan, seeing him loitering near, spoke to him. After some conversation Jahan Khan invited him to the mission compound, and, hospitality being a law among them, he took him home with him.

Taib Khan was even more deeply impressed by the quiet and peace of this little Christian household, and the greatest surprise of all was to find that Amrit-bibi, the wife of Jahan Khan, was not the drudge and chattel of a jealous husband, as is usual in the Afghan home, but friend and helpmate, and an active worker with him in the mission hospital. Realizing that Jahan Khan was an Afghan like himself, with the same prejudices, the same hot recklessness of disposition, he questioned : "Whence could these things come—this quiet self-control, this self-abnegation, this joy and inward peace."

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He began to study the Christian Scriptures, and it was not long before he asked for baptism and was ready to accompany the padre sahib and Jahan Khan to the bazaar preaching.

XVIII

JAHAN KHAN and Amrit-bibi had been happily married for about four years; two sturdy little sons had been added to their home circle and one delicate little daughter, who was the light of their eyes, when Jahan Khan volunteered for foreign service in the mission field.

An American missionary working in an isolated district on the Persian Gulf appealed to Dr. Pennell for a worker to go out to assist him in his labours among the wild and highly fanatical tribesmen of Bahrein. Only one with the instincts of a pioneer and some experience of work among Moslems could give the help needed. Knowing that Jahan Khan possessed special qualifications for such work, Dr. Pennell with mixed feelings consented to part with him, and Amrit-bibi, though full of motherly anxieties for her little ones, determined to go with him, knowing full well the many opportunities a woman medical worker finds among the suffering women and children of Moslems. Preparations were soon completed, and a farewell meeting was held in

Bannu to bid Godspeed to these two—the first Afghan missionaries—who were stepping out into an unknown world.

Shortly after their arrival a great sorrow befel them. Their "Little Pearl," the light of their eyes, was taken ill, and He Who said "Suffer little children to come unto Me" called her from a life of pain and suffering to His own eternal keeping. She was laid to rest in the little mission cemetery at Bahrein.

For some time Jahan Khan worked faithfully with the American missionary among these fanatical Arabs. They were superstitious and ignorant even of their own religion, but Jahan Khan's fearlessness, together with his warm-heartedness and ready understanding, greatly influenced them, and he soon made friends.

When he could be spared to return to Bannu he took up work again in the hospital with tremendous enthusiasm, and quickly added to his knowledge of medicine and surgery. Before and after going to Bahrein, Jahan Khan often accompanied Dr. Pennell in his visits to the villages. Many an exciting experience did they share, and many were their talks as they climbed the lower slopes of the mountains or crossed the open country. When they reached a village their

fame soon spread, and patients flocked to the dispensary, and the doctor and his helpers had their hands full. Together they brought physical relief to hundreds, and conveyed the message of Christ's love to many a weary and suffering heart.

XIX

BETWEEN Bannu on the south and Kohat on the north is a tract of rough, mountainous country inhabited by a hardy race of Pathans called Khattaks. The valley, of which Karak is the chief town, is very fertile. It is often spoken of as "the granary of the Khattaks," and in spring and summer the valley does literally "stand thick with corn." In every direction, far as the eye can reach, broad stretches of corn wave in the gentle breeze. Villages and little farmsteads are frequent, and everywhere the people—men, women, and children—work on the land which so richly rewards their labours. Water is plentiful and near the surface, and every little holding has its own well, the picturesque Persian water wheel being turned by a blindfolded buffalo which walks round and round in a circle. Given an ample water supply, the soil, which is very rich, will yield two or three crops in the year.

But Karak is not important only as the market town of all this fertile district; it is also a great salt mart. The hills which bound the valley on the north form part of the extensive salt range

that runs through the Kohat district, and large quantities of salt are brought in from the salt quarries close to Karak and sold to traders from the Southern Punjab and Sindh.

This place, with its large Pathan population and commercial activity, its varied life, and diverse interests, bringing merchants and traders from all parts of India, made it an ideal centre for mission work. Dr. Pennell, with Jahan Khan and others of his Indian workers, visited Karak, but were met with a good deal of opposition, the mullahs having previously warned the people to beware of their medicines and on no account to listen to their teachings.

But shortly after one of their visits a man on horseback came riding into the town. Through all the bustle and confusion of the irregular streets, threading his way among strings of heavily-laden camels with their jingling bells, street vendors, and donkey boys, the horseman made for the caravanserai. The sun was high and burning in a sky of dazzling blue, and they stopped to rest awhile in the welcome shadow of the cloister walls.

The man was a handsome, swaggering fellow with a friendly word for the passers-by—quite a wonderful fellow—and one and another stopped

to listen to his story till quite a crowd had gathered round. This stranger was the proud possessor of an artificial leg. Oh, yes, he could walk quite well, as he showed them, and the feringhi daktar sahib at Bannu had sent all the way to England to get it for him. True, it had cost the price of a rifle, but then he could walk quite easily. He swaggered up and down on his new leg, and the people crowded round to see the phenomenon. Only to save his life, he told them, had he consented to the amputation; like all Afghans, he had a deep-rooted aversion to amputation, but what sense was there in dying before the time when you could get a new leg almost as good as the old one? And should the military get a hit at this one—well, it wouldn't hurt much! This sally provoked a roar of laughter, until some one said: "That's all very well, but I shouldn't care to be a limb short in the next world."

"Oh, I got over that matter quite easily," said the horseman, pointing proudly to a package that hung from his saddle bag. "I brought my old leg away, and at the appointed time it will be buried with me in the ancestral grave, so that the angels will find it there on the resurrection morning." There was a murmur of approval from the

crowd, and the man, keenly enjoying the situation, continued to expatiate upon his forethought.

"The daktar sahib is not such a bad fellow, but I was too sharp for him.

"He said : 'Let it be buried in the compound here, and put a note in the ancestral grave when the time comes saying where it may be found.'

"I said : 'See here, daktar sahib, that is not good enough. Do you suppose the angels will have time to go round looking for my leg on the resurrection morning ? Besides, even if they had the time, do you suppose they would go into that heretic place to look for it any way ?'"

The men grunted their approval of this sentiment, and the women nodded comprehendingly.

XX

THE tale of the horseman made a deep impression on the people of Karak. The matter was discussed on all sides. Many of the traders corroborated the stories of the wonderful cures effected by the feringhi doctor and his helpers, and people from the neighbouring villages also could tell of health renewed and sight restored, and one and all testified to the unvarying kindness received from the Christians at Bannu. One mullah openly averred that the Christians worshipped only one God and abominated idol worship, and that their book was of a truth the Word of God ; it was right that Moslems make friendship with them ; indeed, in a verse in the Koran, Mohammed himself enjoined friendship with the Christians, because there were so many devout men and monks among them. This frank partisanship naturally called for violent abuse from the other mullahs, but it broke down much of the prejudice in the minds of the Khattaks, and when, soon after, the daktar sahib and Jahan Khan came again from Bannu

the attitude of the people was friendly, although certain mullahs vigorously opposed their preaching.

A crowd collected round the wayside dispensary. There seemed some hesitation about accepting their medicine until one old woman pushed her way through, leading a blind man by the hand. With tears she pleaded with the daktar sahib to cure her son. He needed new eyes. Would the daktar sahib of his great kindness cure him? She would work to pay him. Assuring her there was nothing to pay, the doctor examined the patient's eyes. Like sunshine through the storm clouds came the joyful news. Old Meriem threw herself at the doctor's feet in the abandonment of her happiness. The man himself, bereft of speech by sudden hope, stood silent. Could it be true? The feringhi doctor had promised him new sight.

The news spread through the crowd like wildfire. The doctor was besieged with patients; others begged him to come to their hamlets and see their sick folks; opportunities opened for him to get right into the homes and hearts of the people.

After this his visits to the valley were frequent. He was urged to start permanent work there.

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A suitable site was offered, the inhabitants collected a subscription which more than covered the price of the ground, and an unexpected gift of a thousand rupees from a frontier officer, who was anxious that work should be started among them, cleared away all difficulties.

A thoroughly reliable man being needed for this isolated post, no one was better fitted to undertake it than Jahan Khan and his devoted wife. He had acquired great proficiency in medicine and surgery in the mission hospital after his return from Bahrein, and his influence over the Afghans was remarkable. Yet at the first both he and his wife had to meet with much antagonism and prejudice because they were "perverts from Islam," but their patience, the consistency of their lives, and their uniform kindness to all the sick and needy who sought their aid, gradually won the people, and they had the joy of seeing many converts through their medical work.

Some of the more fanatical Moslems, enraged that the Gospel should be preached in their town, hired a professional assassin to shoot Jahan Khan. This man was indebted to the skill and attention of the young native doctor for his recovery from a serious illness. When, therefore, he discovered

the identity of his victim, he returned the money and warned Jahan Khan to be on his guard.

But Jahan Khan was undaunted. He traced his would-be murderers, who he discovered had once been patients in the hospital. He sought them out and talked with them, and, while forgiving them freely, he pointed out the ingratitude of their behaviour. This touched them deeply, and they became his staunch partisans, and it was a strange sight to see the very men who were once thirsting for his blood in the name of their religion sitting quietly round Jahan Khan, listening attentively while he recounted to them the story of the Cross.

XXI

DR. PENNELL paid frequent visits to his old pupil, and great was Jahan Khan's joy when these opportunities came of consulting his chief and receiving his never-failing encouragement and help. On one of these visits the Bishop of Lahore accompanied the doctor, for so marked had been the progress in the work and the change in the temper of the Khattaks that the foundation of a church was to be laid and a Christian cemetery consecrated. Truly it was a great day in Karak, not least for Jahan Khan.

But a few weeks later a great blow fell, for his beloved friend and leader, Dr. Pennell, passed away at Bannu.

* * * * *

Jahan Khan, the once raw, vindictive Pathan lad, now the devoted follower of Jesus Christ, continues as a sacred trust the work in this mission outpost, committed to his charge by his dearly loved daktar sahib.

Seasons of storm and stress are still encountered for the work's sake. Even in the year 1920 the little hospital at Karak was attacked by

Waziris, about 700 of whom, with a company of Mahsuds and a few Khattak outlaws, surrounded the town, picketing the hills and cutting the telegraph wires. They broke into the dispensary and climbed into the upper story of the hospital, calling loudly for Jahan Khan. Windows and doors were smashed, all the lotion and medicine bottles broken, and the registers torn up. Jahan Khan with his wife and little ones were all in their own quarters adjoining the hospital, keeping absolutely quiet. Amid the deafening clamour Jahan Khan said, taking his little girl Bibi Miriam into his arms : "This is a time to test our faith. We must all pray to God for help." The little girl nestled close. "Father, dear," she whispered, "I have been praying for a long time."

A moment later from the police post close by the sepoys opened fire upon the enemy, who hastily scattered, carrying off all the dental instruments by way of loot. Reaching the church, the Waziris made a stand; again the sepoys opened fire, and the church was damaged by the firing from both sides. Doors and windows were destroyed ere they were driven from cover. The villagers put up a stubborn fight, but from morning till night the Waziris held the town.

They plundered the wealthy Hindus, against whom they hold an eternal grudge. Some they killed, others were carried off as hostages to be held up for ransom later on. Toward evening they gathered together all the donkeys and camels belonging to the town and salt mines, loaded them up with their dead and wounded (their casualties had been heavy) and all the loot they had collected, and made an effectual escape to the hills.

The little band of Christians had escaped uninjured. Jahan Khan's life has been spared, and he still continues his work as a "light bearer" to the tribesmen of the North-West Frontier.

The mission hospital work referred to in the foregoing pages is that connected with the Church Missionary Society, which is responsible for the maintenance of eight main hospitals in North-west India and several out-stations. Further information may be had from the Medical Mission Auxiliary, C.M. House, Salisbury Square, E.C. 4.

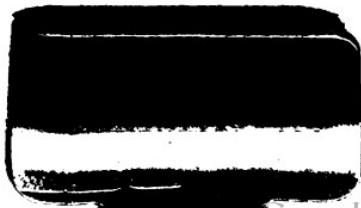
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